

## Malta's share of tropical butterflies

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The interesting paper on "Tropical Butterflies in the Mediterranean" by my friend Torben LARSEN, which appeared in the recent issue of Nota Lepid. 9 (1-2) : 63-77 made me go through the short list of recorded butterflies in the Maltese Islands to find out what is their share in this respect, and how they compare with the neighbouring countries.

The Maltese Islands, though small in size, enjoy a vantage position in the centre of the Mediterranean and serve as a stepping stone to three continents. Birds, butterflies and other insects often have a period of rest on the islands in their migratory urge.

The first palaeotropical butterfly recorded is undoubtedly the *Lampides boeticus* LINNÉ, as it appears in Count CARUANA GATTO's list in 1891 ; it is also later recorded by T. BAINBRIGGE FLETCHER R. N. in 1905 as well as by A. ANDRES, a German prisoner-of-war in 1916, but it is lacking in P. BORG's list 1932. However by 1944 it had become quite common and was producing two to three broods a year. Its caterpillar is found feeding in the pods of leguminous plants both wild and cultivated.

In 1925 Count CARUANA GATTO published an interesting paper in which we find listed : *Pieris mesentina* CRAM. now known as *Anaphaeis aurota* FABRICIUS, *Danaus chrysippus* LIN. var. *alcippus* CRAM. and *Lampides telicanus* = *Syntarucus pirthous* LIN. The *aurota* was taken on the 19th July 1910 in San Anton Gardens by Col. HARFORD. It has not been taken again up to the present day. The *Danaus chrysippus* var. *alcippus* was taken on the 4th June 1923 in Hastings Gardens on the bastions of Valletta again by Col. HARFORD. Funny enough, I was lucky to take two specimens of this butterfly 29 years after its first appearance on the island : this was on the 10th April 1952.

When I wrote a note in the local paper about its appearance, with a picture, Lt. Cmdr. Terence BUTLER wrote another note in the same paper stating that while picnicking close to Villa Gomerino at Ghemieri, limits of Rabat, he also saw this butterfly on the 10th April 1952.

The *Syntarucus pirthous* was taken on the 29th October 1910 by the same Col. HARFORD in a private garden at St Julian's Bay. Count CARUANA GATTO

maintained that the three butterflies were either blown to the island by strong winds or introduced in the pupal state on some merchandise or on ships. Migration of butterflies, 60 years ago, was not as yet thought of!!

*S. pirthous* was not recorded by P. BORG 1932 and it was in July 1944 that I saw it flying in limited numbers on the flowers of the *Plumbago capensis* at San Anton Gardens ; since then it has spread all over the island and become quite common, not only in gardens but also in valleys where it must have another favourite foodplant, possibly *Rubus fruticosus*. It is a regular visitor to my garden in October and November when the *Antigonon leptopus* is in bloom.

*Catopsilia florella* FABRICIUS was taken by an R.A.F. FL.LT. K.A. HARRISON on the 1st July 1963 in the gardens of the R.A.F. Officers' Mess Luqa, when his aircraft was unserviceable from the 30th June to the 2nd July. This capture was passed on to me in 1973 when I recorded it in the Entom. Rec. 1974 : 86 : 196. This is the only record for Malta so far.

On the 12th March my friend Guido BONETT, while taking part in a bird ringing session at Ghadira Pool in the north-west of the island, happened to disturb a tiny butterfly which fluttered flimsily close to the ground. As it was still early in the morning, and he had no net, he managed to take it by hand and put it in a match-box. This tiny butterfly turned up to be *Zizeeria knysna* TRIMEN, an interesting capture !! Two years later, at an auction sale there was a small collection of local butterflies amongst which there was a specimen of this butterfly which was taken by Victor PORTELLI at Wied Zembaq limits of Birzebbuga in the south of the island, in March 1966. This specimen was recorded by C. AQUILINA 1981. So far two specimens have been recorded from opposite localities. The latest discovery is the uninterrupted visits of *Danaus chrysippus chrysippus* LINNÉ from 1978 to the present day.

The following table shows the number of sightings/captures of this Danaid up to the end of 1985.

	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
1978	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
1979	3	4	11	—	—	5	1	—
1980	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
1981	—	—	—	—	3	1	—	—
1982	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—
1983	—	1	—	—	—	—	2	2
1984	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
1985	—	—	2	3	—	—	7	5

Comparing LARSEN's Table 1, it is found that the number of records in France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece does not exceed the number recorded in the Maltese Islands which I presume is due to their position in the Mediterranean Sea.

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